having a pK_a of less than about -6.0 at 25°C. Examples of strong acids include *p*-toluenesulfonic acid, sulfuric acid, hydrochloric acid, hydrobromic acid, nitric acid, trifluoroacetic acid, and perchloric acid.

Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

Please cancel claim 1.

2. (Amended) The composition of claim 11, said composition further comprising a compound selected from the group consisting of phenolic compounds, carboxylic acids, phosphoric acid, and cyano compounds.

5. (Amended) The composition of claim 11, wherein said composition comprises a compound selected from the group consisting of surfactants, crosslinking agents, and mixtures thereof.

8. (Amended) The composition of claim 11, wherein said solvent system includes a solvent selected from the group consisting of PGMEA, PGME, propylene glycol *n*-propyl ether, 2-heptanone, *N*–methylpyrollidinone, ethyl lactate, cyclohexanone, ethylene glycol monomethyl ether, ethylene glycol monoethyl ether, and mixtures thereof.

9. (Amended) The composition of claim 11, wherein said polymer is selected from the group consisting of acrylic polymers, polyesters, epoxy novolaks, polysaccharides, polyethers, polyimides, and mixtures thereof.

11. (Amended) In an anti-reflective coating composition for use during microlithographic processes, said composition comprising a polymer dissolved in a solvent system, the improvement being that said composition comprises less than about 0.3% by weight of a strong acid and gives a spin bowl compatibility test result of greater than about 90%.

12. (Amended) In an anti-reflective coating composition for use during microlithographic processes, said composition comprising a polymer dissolved in a solvent system and having a weight ratio of strong acid to weak acid, the improvement being that the weight ratio is from about 0:100 to about 50:50.

24. (Amended) In an anti-reflective coating composition for use during microlithographic processes, said composition comprising a polymer dissolved in a solvent system, the improvement being that said composition comprises a compound selected from the group consisting of Bisphenol A and α-cyano-4-hydroxycinnamic acid.

27. (Amended) The composition of claim 24, said composition having a weight ratio of strong acid to weak acid, wherein the weight ratio of strong acid to weak acid in said composition is from about 0:100 to about 50:50.

Please cancel claim 29.

30. (Amended) The combination of claim 36, said composition further comprising a compound selected from the group consisting of phenolic compounds, carboxylic acids, phosphoric acid, and cyano compounds.

33. (Amended) The combination of claim 36, wherein said composition comprises a compound selected from the group consisting of surfactants, crosslinking agents, and mixtures thereof.

34. (Amended) The combination of claim 36, wherein said polymer is selected from the group consisting of acrylic polymers, polyesters, epoxy novolaks, polysaccharides, polyethers, polyimides, and mixtures thereof.

36. (Amended) The combination of a substrate having a surface and a cured protective layer on said substrate surface, said cured protective layer being formed from a composition comprising a polymer dissolved in a solvent system and less than about 0.3% by weight of a strong acid, said composition giving a spin bowl compatibility test result of greater than about 90%.

46. (Amended) The combination of a substrate having a surface and a cured protective layer on said substrate surface, said cured protective layer being formed from a composition comprising a polymer dissolved in a solvent system and a compound selected from the group consisting of Bisphenol A and α-cyano-4-hydroxycinnamic acid.

51. (Amended) A method of forming a precursor structure for use in manufacturing integrated circuits, said method comprising the step of applying a quantity of an anti-reflective composition according to claim 11 to the surface of a substrate to form an anti-reflective layer on said substrate surface.

Please add the following new claims:

64. In an anti-reflective coating composition for use during microlithographic processes, said composition comprising a polymer dissolved in a solvent system, the improvement being that said composition comprises less than about 0.3% by weight of a strong acid and from about 0.02-5% by weight of a weak acid.

65. The composition of claim 64, wherein said composition gives a spin bowl compatibility test result of greater than about 90%.

66. The combination of a substrate having a surface and a cured protective layer on said substrate surface, said cured protective layer being formed from a composition comprising:

a polymer dissolved in a solvent system;

less than about 0.3% by weight of a strong acid; and

from about 0.02-5% by weight of a weak acid.

67. The composition of claim 66, wherein said composition gives a spin bowl compatibility test result of greater than about 90%.

68. A method of forming a precursor structure for use in manufacturing integrated circuits, said method comprising the step of applying a quantity of an anti-reflective composition according to claim 66 to the surface of a substrate to form an anti-reflective layer on said substrate surface.

69. The method of claim 68, further including the step of baking said anti-reflective layer after said applying step at a temperature of from about 125-225°C.

70. The method of claim 69, further including the step of applying a photoresist to said baked anti-reflective layer.

71. The method of claim 63, furthering including the steps of:

exposing at least a portion of said photoresist layer to activating radiation;

developing said exposed photoresist layer; and

etching said developed photoresist layer.